

## Melissa A. Hart

1962–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE  
REPUBLICAN FROM PENNSYLVANIA

2001–



Image courtesy of the Member

**SPURRED INTO POLITICS BY WHAT SHE PERCEIVED AS HIGH** taxes and inefficient government, Melissa Hart entered elective politics at age 28, winning a seat in the Pennsylvania senate. After a decade in state politics, Hart was elected to the U.S. House in 2000—the first Republican woman to represent Pennsylvania in Congress. Representative Hart has focused on pro-life issues and reviving the economic prospects of her southwestern Pennsylvania district.

Melissa Ann Hart was born on April 4, 1962, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, daughter of Donald Hart, a research chemist, and Albina Hart. After her father's sudden death, Hart and her two siblings worked their way through school to contribute to the family finances.<sup>1</sup> Hart graduated from North Allegheny High School and then majored in business and German, earning her bachelor's degree in 1984 from Washington and Jefferson College in Washington, Pennsylvania. She also joined the Young Republicans as an undergraduate. She completed her jurist doctorate at the University of Pittsburgh in 1987. For a while, she practiced as a lawyer in Pittsburgh. In 1990, at age 28, Hart won election to the Pennsylvania state senate. She told a local newspaper that her political career was spurred by a high property tax increase. "I had never thought of running for office until . . . I realized the money being taken from us wasn't being spent in an effective way," Hart said.<sup>2</sup> Despite hailing from an overwhelmingly Democratic district, she was re-elected twice by wide margins. During her tenure in the state legislature, she chaired the finance committee, helped implement \$4 billion in state tax breaks, and served as vice chair of the urban affairs and housing committee. Phil English, Hart's chief of staff during her Pennsylvania senate career, later became a U.S. Representative.

Hart's ambition to serve in the U.S. Congress began in 2000, when four-term incumbent Democratic Representative Ronald Klink retired from his House seat to campaign for the U.S. Senate. Hart entered the race to succeed him. The district encompassed a large portion of southwestern Pennsylvania that included six counties. Though socially conservative, its history of union support usually kept it in the Democratic column. Hart's platform supported simplifying the tax code, ending married couples' tax penalties, and increasing economic development in

western Pennsylvania, which had missed much of the 1990s high-technology boom. Hart also supported pro-life positions on the abortion debate. She ran unopposed in the GOP primary and won the general election against her Democratic challenger, a state representative, with 60 percent of the vote, becoming the first Republican elected in the district since 1976. In her subsequent two re-election campaigns, Hart won by similarly comfortable margins.<sup>3</sup>

After arriving at the start of the 107th Congress (2001–2003) in January 2001, Hart was appointed to the three prominent committees: Science, Judiciary, and Financial Services. In the 108th Congress (2003–2005), she was named the vice chair of the Judiciary Committee's Subcommittee on the Constitution.

Over the course of her career in the U.S. Congress, Representative Hart has achieved several significant legislative successes. In the 108th Congress, she authored the Unborn Victims of Violence/Laci and Conner's Law. The measure, which passed Congress and was signed into law by President George W. Bush, provided that in a federal crime of violence against a pregnant woman in which her unborn child is harmed, the perpetrator can be prosecuted for two crimes against two victims. Hart also has opposed the partial-birth abortion procedure and has introduced legislation that would withhold federal funding from universities that provide their students access to the morning-after birth control pill. Also during the 108th Congress, Hart inserted language into the final signed version of the CAN-SPAM Law requiring sexually explicit e-mails to be labeled so that parents can protect their children from Internet predators. Additionally, Hart introduced legislation to assist in the cleanup of old industrial sites ("brownfields") prevalent in her district and legislation reauthorizing the "Metals Initiative," which aims to make the domestic steel industry competitive.

Hart's principal legislative focus has been to boost the economy in her district. Along with other lawmakers from steel-producing districts, she has urged the Bush administration to impose quotas on imported steel. She also has backed legislation to help laid-off airline workers; Pittsburgh is a major airline hub. Hart also has offered legislation to provide business tax breaks to fund Army Corps of Engineers projects in her district and to expand the boundaries of metropolitan Pittsburgh to increase federal aid to the area.

In January of 2005, Hart won a seat on the House Ways and Means Committee. Serving on this powerful committee—with jurisdiction over taxes, Social Security, and Medicare—will allow Hart to work on the issues critical to Western Pennsylvanians and all Americans.

#### FOR FURTHER READING

*Biographical Directory of the U.S. Congress*, "Melissa A. Hart," <http://bioguide.congress.gov>

#### NOTES

- 1 *Politics in America*, 2004 (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Inc., 2003): 863.
- 2 *Politics in America*, 2004: 863.
- 3 "Election Statistics, 1920 to Present," <http://clerk.house.gov/members/electionInfo/elections.html>.